THE BROOKINGS DOHA CENTER

A Project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR RIGHTS IN THE GULF

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Featured Speaker:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. AMR: Good early evening, everyone. Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests.

I want to thank you all for coming. Salaam aleikum. I want to welcome you to this policy discussion of the Brookings Doha Center, a project of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, with our very distinguished guests, Erica Barks-Ruggles, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of the United States of America, and the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.

Before we get going I'd like to ask you all to please silence your cell phones or turn them off. And let you all know that this event will be on the record. And I also want to welcome the audience on Jazeera Mubashar which will be seeing this shortly.

My name is Hady Amr. I'm the Director of the Brookings Doha Center, and Fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy.

Brookings is one of the oldest and largest think-tanks in the United States of its kind. And the Brookings Doha Center, established in 2007, with an

agreement between Brookings and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar does research and programming on the socioeconomic and geopolitical issues facing the Muslim world and its sub-components.

The goal of the Brookings Doha Center is to be a meeting place for governments, business, the media, academic, NGOs. And we're in the private sector, and we are pleased to continue in that tradition today.

Like Brookings Washington, Brookings Doha is open to a broad range of views. We do not endorse any specific view. And we seek to discuss issues on their own merits, and to advance policy dialogue to be sort of informative to American policy-makers as well as policy-makers throughout the world, including here in the GCC.

I'm very pleased to welcome you all today to our event entitled "The Future of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Rights in the Gulf." We'll go for about 60 minutes. And we're particularly pleased -- I think, actually, the photographers may have gotten enough pictures by now. If you could suspend the photography, that would be great. If you could -- just for the sake of the audience who we're here to serve.

We're particularly pleased to have Erica with us today. Erica is also, in addition to her very distinguished position in the United States Department of State, is also a Brookings alum, and represents some of the finest that the United States and Brookings has to offer.

I'm going to end my remarks here, and just let Erica speak to us now. And then I'll follow up with a few questions, and then we'll open up to the floor for questions for the remaining time.

So I hope you'll join me in welcoming Erica to our Center.

(Applause)

REMARKS BY ERICA BARKS-RUGGLES

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you, Hady and thank all of you for coming. And thank you to the Brookings Institution, for your fine work here in Qatar and for sponsoring thought provoking discussions, including this discussion this evening.

I am grateful for this opportunity to share the views of my government about human rights and reform, here in Qatar and across the region. As you may know -- or you may not know -- I have just come

from Dubai where I participated in subministerial discussions of the Forum for the Future.
This is a joint initiative by the G-8 countries, the governments of this region, as well as civil society institutions in both the G8 region and this region, to promote political, economic and social rights in partnership with each other.

In recent years, Qatar and other Gulf countries have increasingly come into the international spotlight, not only as economic partners and centers for investment and regional growth, but also for their emerging reform efforts in key areas, for example in the area of democratic development, women's empowerment, labor rights, and the independent media. And I am pleased that Al-Jazeera is here broadcasting our session today.

Let me begin by saying that my government's support for human rights and political reform here in Qatar as well as in the Middle East in general is integral to our global efforts to do the same. At the center of these efforts is our conviction that every human being has intrinsic value and equal value, and that it is the right of every person to live in freedom. As President Bush said recently: "Freedom is

the non-negotiable right of every man, woman, and child, and the path to lasting peace and stability in our world is through liberty."

The U.S. support for the worldwide advancement of human rights and democratic freedom reflects the core values of the American people and continues to enjoy bipartisan support in our Congress and public, including through successive Administrations, both Republican and Democrat. We see the growing calls from the people of this region for greater personal and political freedom as part of an increasing worldwide demand for human rights and democracy, and we believe that this demand derives fundamentally from the powerful desire of men and women everywhere to live in dignity and liberty. We believe that, wherever they may live, people want to be free to follow their conscience and practice their culture and religion, to speak their minds without fear, to select their government, to hold their leaders accountable and to obtain equal justice under the law.

Many nations, with different histories and very different cultures, facing different circumstances, have successfully incorporated these core principles of human rights into their own systems of governance.

These principles have helped to shape my government's bilateral relationships as well as our foreign assistance. They also guide U.S. words and actions at home and in international bodies.

We do not, however, think that there is a single formula for advancing human rights and political reform. Each country ultimately must find its own solutions and its own path. That said, there are some essential elements and mutually reinforcing elements of any truly free country. And I'd like to briefly go over three of those today. We believe that these elements apply around the world, in this region, as well as right here in Qatar.

First, free and fair electoral processes and contested elections at all levels of government, accountable institutions under the rule of law, and a robust civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the independent media.

Allow me briefly to comment upon each of these elements.

With respect to free and fair elections and participation in the political process, we believe that democratic elections are milestones on a journey of democratization. They can help put a country on the

path to reform, lay the groundwork for institutionalizing human rights protections and good governance, as well as opening space for civil society. My government awaits with interest the setting of a date for national elections here in Qatar. We would be pleased to help, in a non-partisan manner, to further the objective a free and fair elections here, as we do in many countries all over the world.

But beyond a free and fair elections process, people must also have representative, accountable and transparent institutions of governance and government, including political parties based on ideas, not just personalities or tribal or ethnic affiliations, independent legislatures and judiciaries that can act to ensure that leaders who win elections democratically govern democratically once they are in office, as well as the rule of law made democratically by elected representatives that can prevail over corruption and other corrosive influences. The goal is the development of responsive government institutions that protect individual freedoms, rather than restricting them. Qatar's own National Human Rights Committee Secretary General recently stated--and I quote-- "There should be more co-operation between the National Human

Rights Committee and the authorities concerned, so that the protection of human rights becomes part of the country's culture." We could not agree more with these comments.

The element which I mentioned briefly is a vibrant, independent civil society, including unfettered political parties, NGOs and a free media. An open, resilient civil society helps keep elections and those who are elected honest, and democracy-building on track, with citizens contributing to the success of their countries and taking the responsibilities of their own citizenship seriously.

Here in Qatar, as is also the case with many of your neighbors, we note that women are taking a more active role in participating and engaging in the public life of the country, as well as in the private sector and in civil society. And my government strongly supports this trend. An excellent example is Sheikha Mozah, the Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, who is helping lay the groundwork for future development in Qatar's education and health care sectors. The partnership between the Qatar Foundation and the numerous U.S. universities makes us especially proud,

as we believe that partnership and cooperation are key elements in the success of these projects.

Qatar also has a remarkable record of advancing women through education. Women make up, as I understand, almost three quarters of the student body at the University of Qatar. And I'm proud that some of them are here this evening. And welcome. The world is interested to see what the future brings for this country with so many talented, well-educated young women--and young men--who are participating in their society. It also is clear that you already have capable female leadership and are building the groundwork for the future.

If an open, robust civil society contributes to a country's dynamism, as I've just outlined, restricting the political space of civil society members, such as non-governmental organizations and the press, constrains a society's long-term political and democratic development. In the recent past, Qatar's law did not allow for NGOs to register. A modest change, however, occurred in 2006 that has made the registration process easier and we look forward to seeing an increased number and variety of organizations

seeking to register and being active in civil society here.

At the subministerial meeting of the Forum for the Future in Dubai that I was attending earlier this week, as I mentioned, there was broad enthusiasm among all the governments, both from the G8 and the region, and our civil society participants for greater collaboration of civil society groups both with each other and with their governments to tackle the challenges that the region faces. The participants in the meeting affirmed the essential role NGOs play in the reform process. This reflects a growing recognition that in today's increasingly interconnected and globalized world, the problems confronting states are too complex -- even for the most powerful countries -- to tackle alone.

Along with civil society, independent media is also crucial for the development of a free and successful society. It has been our own experience in the United States that the free flow of ideas and information are crucial to addressing a host of contemporary challenges.

Al-Jazeera, which is here this evening, has helped put Doha on the map for many Westerners as it

has become known as one of the most important media outlets in the Arab world. We respect the diversity of opinion and watch Al-Jazeera carefully, hoping that it will continue to strive for balanced reporting of regional and world events.

Now, let me focus for a few minutes on an issue on which I think that government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the independent media, and the international community can all agree on: that we must work, all of us together, to advance the cause of human dignity. All of us, individually and together, can and must do what we can to end exploitive labor practices and the abomination of human trafficking. And this is a global problem, it is not just here in this region. We have it in our own country, and it is in many other countries. And it is one that is especially difficult to tackle in this increasingly globalized world. It requires a concerted response at all levels of government and in civil society, within countries and between countries. My own government has within our bureaucracy been working to tackle this problem inside our borders. We have recognized, through our efforts, that we must reach out and cooperate with other governments and with other

civil society if we are to address this seriously, and we have done so.

In recent years, Qatar and your neighbors, have begun to come to grips with the dual problem of forced labor and human trafficking -- and these two problems go hand in hand. And my government is ready to work in cooperation with the government here and with civil society on these important issues of human dignity and justice. Representatives from my office and the office of the Embassy here have recently toured the government trafficking shelter of the National Office of Combating Trafficking in Humans here in Doha. This is a shelter that is working to alleviate the plight of exploited workers. We laud its establishment, which is in keeping with Islamic values and the wise words of Khalifa Umar, who said: "When did you start to make mankind slaves when their mothers gave birth to them as free people?" I believe that the independent media can play an important role in raising awareness of and combating this problem, as they do in my country and in many other countries around the world.

The abuses workers suffer range from not receiving their full salary to being denied the right to leave the country. Sometimes, the conditions in which they

work are brutal: workers have endured psychological, physiological, and even sexual abuse at the hands of their employers. Workers who have come to this region seeking a means of supporting their families back home in their countries sometimes are subjected to forced labor instead.

In contrast, many companies in this region have managed to engender worker loyalty -- and higher productivity -- by providing a decent wage and healthy working and living conditions and keeping their employees on the job. In the long run, socially responsible policies and actions, with the private sector and the government playing a role, along with reform and implementation of labor laws, will go a long way towards solving the region's labor problems. Increased government collaboration with labor-sending countries as well -- because it is not just a receiving-country problem, it is a sending-country problem as well -- including screening, training, educating, and placing, and protecting workers in a concerted fashion that is transparent through the whole cycle of employment and repatriation would be extremely helpful to tackling this problem.

I wish to leave you with these thoughts as a context for what I hope will be a lively discussion, which I want to leave plenty of time for. Human dignity and human rights are indivisible. Personal, political and economic freedoms reinforce each other, and lasting security can only be built on a foundation of freedom. My government looks forward to further cooperation with your government, with your civil society, both in Qatar and in the region, to advance human dignity and increase awareness of the benefits of reform here and across the region. Again, to quote President Bush, "The best way to defeat extremism is by opening societies, trusting in people, and giving them a voice in their future and their nation."

I want to thank you again for having me here, and I would be pleased to take your questions.

(Applause)

MR. AMR: Thanks. Thank you very much, Erica.

Before I turn this over to the audience I thought I'd kick it off with a bit of a conversation.

I thought it might be useful to discuss here the U.S. government's Human Rights Report that the State Department puts out, and ask you why this is done, and what are most effective things about it, and

what -- where is there room for improvement? The process that we undertake with Americans?

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Sure. Thanks, Hady.

I think the process has not been very well understood. Our Human Rights Report, as well as our Trafficking in Persons Report, which just came out recently, and our International Religious Freedom Report are all mandated by Congress. In the case of the Human Rights Report, since 1976 we have been -- now in our 32nd year of doing this report. It is required that we report, in the case of the Human Rights Report, on every country around the world.

These reports are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a U.N. document signed by all countries that are member nations of the U.N., as well as each country's individually undertaken international treaty obligations, including the Convention Against Torture, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women -- all of which are addressed in our Human Rights Reports, whether countries have signed and what they

are doing to implement their obligations undertaken on these issues.

These reports are researched, fact-checked, based on information provided by a wide variety of sources, including reports to U.N. bodies, including reports from NGOs and civil society, reports from our embassies and research done by our embassies overseas, as well as information we receive in Washington.

They are not exhaustive. They do not cover every single human rights case because if they did they would be so long that we would not be able to actually publish them.

They are meant to be illustrative and to demonstrate trends, and to talk about what has happened in the last year. They don't talk about 10 years' worth of record. Each year reports.

But when you look at the body of them over time, one can see trends -- both positive and negative -- in human rights situations and the advancement of liberty around the world and in regions.

MR. AMR: And so does the State Department use these, or does the Congress use these in determining aid levels, or in sitting down with governments and saying, you know, "This is the report on your country,

and this is how you fare with your neighbors?" Or is it just a report that's just out there for the general public.

I mean, is it a -- what is it used for?

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Yes -- we do not use the reports to compare countries against each other. Each one is fact-checked, and each one is factually based on what is happening in each country.

The Human Rights Reports have been a useful tool for researchers. They've been a useful tool for our Congress to look at trends. They've been a useful tool for us, in policy-making, to see where we need to be targeting our efforts and programs to be of assistance. Because we believe that part of the reason we do these reports, and part of what is useful about them, is so that we can also offer our help in partnership and collaboration with countries, with their governments and with their civil societies to address the issues and the problems that we see and the challenges that we all face.

So they're not meant to be punitive, they're not meant to be only critical. Indeed, they do criticize government actions and actions, oftentimes, of others that are against what the government is

trying to do. But we use them to look and see where we can be of most assistance, and to have a conversation, to start dialoguing with governments, with civil society about how to improve the situation, how to actually tackle the challenges -- not just talk about it, but then implement programs, implement changes, implement reforms.

MR. AMR: I know that just today in the newspapers there were some, you know, statements by the GCC in particular saying that, you know, they regretted in particular the Trafficking in Persons Report, and expressed some frustration with that.

I wonder if you could, you know, share with us the nuances about that. I know that's not your specific mandate but —

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Right.

MR. AMR: -- since we have you here, I couldn't' resist the opportunity to put you on the hot seat.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: No -- and I -- the statement that was issued today by the Gulf Countries, by the GCC, about the report, as you said, evinced some concern. We stand by the reports. As I said, they are fact based, they are factually checked.

And, no, they do not pull punches. But they also do note where improvements have been made, and where there have been positive actions undertaken.

We base these reports on actions and implementation of laws, regulations and reforms that address these issues. The statement that was issued today talked about the efforts the governments are beginning to work on to address this issue. And we welcome their commitment to undertake those reforms, and we are happy to work with both government and civil society to implement those reforms and bring concrete changes on the ground that will help those who have suffered from trafficking, and to stop and prevent it from happening in the future.

MR. AMR: Thank you.

I've taken enough time. I want to turn the questions to the audience. I will try to get to all of you. And I'd like just to ask everyone who does ask a question to quickly state their name, their affiliation, and to try to ask a question, not make a statement, and to keep your questions to a minute and a half.

So I'm going to start with the young lady here, and then the gentleman, and then I'll work around the side.

SPEAKER: I have, I think, two questions for —

MR. AMR: Your name and affiliation.

SPEAKER: Oh, my name is (inaudible) and I'm a (inaudible).

And the first (inaudible), free and fair elections and (inaudible), but what about Dubai. They don't have a free and fair election process. The people in Dubai (inaudible) are very dissatisfied with their government. And not only that, they also believe there is -- they're (inaudible) by their government.

Second of all, with the growing anti-American sentiment in the region, what type of impact can any policy, any American policy, have on any (inaudible) in the region.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Great. Thanks, Vera.

To your first question on free and fair elections -- as I said at the beginning, we do not have a prescription or a formula for how to get to democracy, or what a democracy should look like. There are many, many forms of democracy around the world. We happen to have a federal system, other countries have

parliamentary systems. And there have been many different formulations of how you get to democracy and grow democracy.

And I think there is a recognition that people want to have a voice in their government, that they want to have a say in what policies their government is addressing, what issues and challenges their government is prioritizing, how money is being spent, is corruption being tackled?

And while democracy is oftentimes messy, as Winston Churchill said, it's the worst form of government until you look at all the other forms of government, and then it comes out being the best.

And it's a tough challenge in the region to figure out how to give people a voice and a say, and to provide accountability, and to provide good governance. I mean, it's one of those issues where, you know, it may not be an imperative, and people marching in the streets today, but increasingly, in this region, with huge youth populations, very, very well educated, very globalized, they speak out. They're on the internet, they're blogging, they're web-chatting, they're text messaging with their friends who are in Singapore and

in London and everywhere else. And they see themselves as citizens of the world.

And that is increasingly the case all over the world, and increasingly those networked and interconnected youth, through private sector, through NGOs, through civil society, are saying, "We want somebody to listen to us." And the best way for people to be listened to and have a voice in meeting the challenges that we all face in a globalized world -- the challenges of, you know, global climate change, of terrorism, of international trafficking, with disease, et cetera -- we all have to be working on these issues.

And people are going to have a say. It's better if they have a say peacefully. And having that democratic voice is really important.

And so we believe that it's -- and we've seen the trends. It's growing. Women are voting. More people are voting in this region than have ever voted before. The trend towards elected representatives of some form has been growing, because I think there is a recognition that people want their voices to be heard.

So I think that trend will continue.

As far as anti-American sentiment, this has been an issue that we have had to deal with for a

number of years now, and it comes and goes. You know, there's waves. Sometimes it's worse, sometimes it's better. Sometimes it's based on decisions or actions taken by our government. Sometimes it's based on decisions or actions taken by other governments. And sometimes it's just based on where public opinion is going at the moment.

Yes, certainly, it makes our job harder, but that's why are out here working at it. Because at the end of the day, the U.S. and the American people believe that we need to be working with the rest of the world to tackle all the challenges that all of us have.

The U.S. cannot close itself down because our economy, our relationships, are all dependent on the rest of the world, as well. And so, you know, we have to get out here and address the root causes of concern, and figure out how to work on them, and work on them in partnership. And that's what we're doing.

And I think that trend has been improving.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. My name is Hasan Al Jufairi, and I'm from (inaudible). And I am also a human rights activist. And I (inaudible).

And my question about why your administration calling some Arab countries moderates, (inaudible)

countries, while they are isolating men like me, a man of peace. I am a moderate person. I love all cultures, all religions, all different colors. (Inaudible) extremists, radicals, they pay for their competition through our -- the money that is generated from sales of oil to promote hate, to promote extremism. And they lecture our youth and children about bombing, about refusing, rejecting the others.

Everybody knows me in Qatar. I am a man of peace. I am being, for example, isolated. I wrote a book. Two weeks ago the government told me, "Your book is not allowed." They said some politics there. I said, "Okay, remove the politics and leave the social and environment issues," and they said, "No, the whole book is not allowed."

I am going to conferences, I am not welcome, while those radicals, extremists are welcome everywhere.

And my question that, you know, the media is owned by the state, or by persons who are related to the state. So I am also (inaudible) newspapers. I am a good writer also. You can check my writing. And, you know, I (inaudible) the same four or five women, they put them in each conference.

And also, these conferences also like the propaganda, you know, to shine. And the recommendations go in the drawers.

And I am asking for quality of education for the children. They brainwash them and the become, when they become 18 years old they hand them over to Weill Cornell, and Texas A&M, it's too late.

And I am asking for good education for children. I am not welcome anywhere, not only in Qatar but maybe other GCC countries and Arab countries will be the same.

MR. AMR: Thank you.

SPEAKER: I welcome you, again, in Qatar, and I love you all. I am (inaudible).

MR. AMR: Thank you. I mean, if I could summarize the question, you know question about state-owned media and the role of state-owned media and, you know, education.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you for your comments.

There are many, many challenges in this region, and many, many challenges that all of us face that are posed by the use and, I would say, abuse of religion by those who want to propagate extremism. And

this is a very serious issue that we are concerned about, that others in the international community are concerned about. The U.N. has talked about this in numerous fora -- and that the leadership and governments of this region as well as the civil society and the media of this region have talked about for a number of years.

And there are efforts -- and it is variegated, in some countries faster, in other countries slower -- to work on these issues. And that includes educational reform, looking at the education system, how we educate our children, tolerance, justice, respect for rule of law, respect for others -- these are all values that are at the core of our religions, at the core of our being. These are human values, they're not American values, they're not Arab values, they're human values. We all want a better world for our kids where they can travel freely, where they can choose where to work so they can get a good education and have good health care. These are all things that all of us want. We all want respect. We all want justice.

And so figuring out how to make that reality for our citizens, to promote tolerance, to promote the

idea that we can agree to disagree without being disagreeable, that we can have those discussions on some things where we may not have agreements, but where we can actually tolerate diversity of opinion, diversity of thought and diversity of choices, without anybody feeling threatened and without anybody feeling excluded.

And that is the global challenge that we all face and that we all have to work on very seriously. And it's part of what we try and do every day. We have programs in many, many countries working on interfaith tolerance and interfaith connections. We have programs in many countries working on educational reform for countries that don't necessarily have the resources.

Qatar has the resources to do this, and we see efforts, and we hope that those will go forward faster. And we are here, I am here. I was in Dubai to talk with governments and civil society about this, to work in partnership on these efforts, because it isn't one country's responsibility, it's all of our responsibilities to work on these issues.

MR. AMR: Thanks. There are some questions here -- one, two, three. Blue shirt.

SPEAKER: (Off mike)

MR. AMR: Okay.

MR. KANKEE : I'm Zachary Kankee with the Journalism Boot Camp Program.

The U.S.'s stated position, of course, is that free press is vital for democracy, as you've said. How does the U.S. reconcile this with statements made and attacks made against Al-Jazeera, the closest thing the region has to that?

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: I think my statements here on Al-Jazeera, welcoming their presence and talking about the fact that they are well known because they are a network that speaks their voices, and hoping that they will work on responsibly and accurately reporting throughout the region and globally, to stand on their own.

MR. AMR: That was a quick answer to a hard question.

MR. PINTAK: I'm Lawrence Pintak from American University in Cairo.

We recently released a survey of Arab journalists that found that, among other things, they put human rights issues, political and social reform on a very high level, real priority (inaudible).

But equally, an overwhelming majority of them simply don't believe the U.S. government when it says it supports democracy, supports human rights. And they see things like the report as simply words. And that certainly tracks public opinion in the region.

What do you say to that?

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: What I say here, and what I say in the U.S., and what I say elsewhere is all the same thing: look at our actions, look at what we're doing around the world. The U.S. has been supporting reforms. We stand out and we speak out when people are being oppressed. When there are independent media who are thrown in prison, we speak out. When women who are agitating for human rights for just having a march in celebration of International Women's Day in Tehran are thrown in prison, we speak out. When there are abuses in the labor force of children in Bangladesh, where I was just two weeks ago, we speak out. When there are governments that are not addressing the issue of child soldiers, as in Sri Lanka where I was, again, two weeks ago, we speak out.

So we use our voice. But we also use the tools of diplomacy that are available to us. This includes offering help -- not just criticizing, but

offering help. We have, my bureau has programs around the world, totaling $330 million this year to work with civil society to address human rights issues, including women's rights, teaching women, civil society activities, how to campaign for increased rights and an increase voice throughout the world; networking new women legislators in Afghanistan with their counterparts in Bangladesh and Pakistan to talk about how do you do legislation, how do you write legislation to help with women's issues.

Looking at issues of independent media and civil society in places like Syria, where they have been seriously oppressed. Working on how do you network effectively in a region, activists who are working on not necessarily human rights issues but issues that affect their communities, such as education, when you have educational reform efforts in one country, getting them together with their neighboring country to talk about these issues.

So we're putting our money where our mouths are, as well, on these. But we're also saying when there are serious abuses, we're not going to let it go unrecognized.

Our reports are part of that process. Sometimes Congress which is independent, as we all know, cuts off funding when they see serious abuse. And we continue to reach out to civil society even in places where governments are closed and where they say you can't work with civil society. Burma is a recent example, where the government is not just creating a humanitarian disaster by their inaction in not letting, you know, the offers of the international community, the U.N., Indonesia, Bangladesh -- dozens and dozens of countries offering assistance which they have not allowed in. It's not just a humanitarian disaster, though -- which is serious -- but they have also been suppressing their people, imprisoning Aung San Suu Kyi for decades simply because she won an election.

And we will continue to work with civil society in that country as we have done for the last number of years to try and help bring about reform so that the people of Burma can have the voice that they want. And we do that in repressive societies around the world.

So I think it's a combination of what we do and what we say. And, you know, we'll continue doing

and saying. And I would say judge us by what we do and what we say.

MR. AMR: Thank you.

Sir, you had your hand up. There are three other questions here, and then there were two over here.

So we'll get you, sir, there, and then we'll get back over here. I'm just trying to get the questions as they came up, in order.

MR. HUNT: Hi, Jeremy Hunt from Bell Pottinger Communications here in Qatar.

Two quick points, one on democracy and one on human dignity.

Is there not room in the Gulf -- specifically (inaudible) Qatar -- for developing long-term policy under what essentially is an absolute monarchy, if a benevolent regime here.

And, secondly, on human dignity, have you not seen -- well, apartheid is one, in South Africa, that's simply being replaced by what's effectively an economic apartheid. And that's certainly very evident here in the Gulf.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: If I'm understanding your question right, your two-part question, that the first

part was asking is there room for democracy here in the Gulf?

MR. HUNT: (Off mike) -- what is essentially an absolute monarchy here, (inaudible) effective a model (inaudible).

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Look, as I said earlier, there is no prescribed path to democracy. Each country and each region is going to have to sort it out for themselves. We have experience that we think is important and can help, but we also have expertise and lots of civil society and government expertise that can help as countries are trying to reform and bring more democracy in.

But we don't have a prescribed path. And even if we did, it's pointless. Democracy needs to come from the people. That's the meaning of the word "democracy." You can't enforce it from the outside. It has to come from within. We can encourage, we can cajole, we can pressure to move that process along faster. But I think when you look at human history -- as I said at the beginning -- there are things that are common to all people, that they want a say in how their resources are being used, and what their children are learning, and where priorities are in their government

and in policies that are being undertaken. Is corruption being addressed? Are they receiving justice? And if injustices are being done, how are those being addressed.

Democracy has been proven time and again to be the most effective form of government in delivering those.

And so, is there room for movement within a system that is already existing here? Of course there's room for movement. And we've seen some movement, and some reforms. And many efforts to try and bring civil society more into that discussion throughout the region.

SPEAKER: (Off mike) -- economic success.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: I don't believe that any people around the world are, you know, inherently less equal than others and so therefore should have less of a voice, or less liberty, simply because of where they are born. Each individual has inherent and equal worth, regardless of where they were born, regardless if they were born a poor person in, you know, Haiti, or if they were born a wealthy person in Qatar, or if they were born, you know, a purple person in Britain -- they

have inherent and equal value and worth because they are human beings.

And so for me to say -- or for anybody to say -- that you don't deserve a voice in your future, you don't deserve to have a voice, is something that is just anachronistic to the reality of the human condition.

Now, how you get there, and how much of a voice you have is something that has to be negotiated and worked out in each society. But I believe, at the end of the day, delivering human dignity, delivering liberty, and delivering justice are much more easily done, and much more fairly done by democratic governments because of their nature, because people are participating in the process and have a voice.

MR. AMR: Thanks.

There were two questions here, and then we'll come back to the -- we'll work our way back. So, the gentleman in the front. I'll let you guys fight it out.

SPEAKER: My name is Nabeel El Masry. I'm an Arab-American residing in Qatar for now.

When you said about the free election which is a requirement, which I agree with you 100 percent,

we have example to Kuwait which is for years is a leader in democracy and elections in the Gulf area.

But my question is, if the people elected the government that the United States doesn't like, you don't approve of it -- like Hamas, for example. Okay?

Now, grant you, you consider Hamas as a terrorist organization. But would you think that if the U.S. government dealt with the elected government by the people of Palestine, with the elected Hamas -- okay? -- and tried to reform Hamas and deal with it as an entity -- okay? -- I think maybe we gain on a couple of areas. Maybe we'll reform Hamas, number one. Number two, we'll have the capability of our democratic system in the United States, which I adore too much. I really love the democratic system in the United States. I'm very proud of it. And the Constitution is a piece of (inaudible) -- should be studying the Constitution of the United States for (inaudible), especially when the President has only two terms. Thank God for that. Okay?

So that -- I think that.

So maybe you can answer this area about dealing with the elected government that we don't approve of their philosophy or their thinking -- okay?

Number two, it's a two-way street, I believe, you know, when it comes to democracy and equal rights, Qatar, the smallest Arab country, or the second smallest Arab country, should be on equal footing with the United States, which is the biggest number one country in the world.

Having said that anybody else also they have equal rights, so would you accept if Qatar rated the United States human rights activity or abuses also? And would the rating connect -- I don't think it will be acceptable -- okay?

My question is profiling -- do you approve of profiling? And you know what I'm talking about.

I've been a U.S. citizen since the early '70s, and I've been profiled since 9/11. And I really don't like it. You know what? I'm not going back to the United States unless they stop profiling.

Thank you.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you. As I see it there were three questions there, so let me address them in reverse order.

On the profiling issue, the President, our Justice Department, our Attorney General, have stated unequivocally that profiling is illegal. There have

been cases brought in the U.S. court system about this issue that have been upheld by our independent courts that profiling is illegal. People who have been subjected to this have successfully brought lawsuits. Yes -- no, there have been. And it is an important issue because there have been abuses, and there has been discrimination -- not only of Arab-Americans, but also of Sikh's because they were wearing turbans and people were mistaken and ignorant about what the turban meant.

But also, I mean, throughout our history you can see places where discrimination has been taking place. I mean, the fact that it took until the 1960s for us to seriously address racial discrimination issues against African Americans in our country is a great stain on our history.

But, that said, our system of institutions, of democratic institutions, always striving to improve, has helped address those issues over time, and continues to address those issues and make improvements, and make sure that people's individual rights are protected. Because you're no less of a person, and you should not be treated differently, simply because you are, you know, yellow, brown, black,

green, orange, purple -- or male or female, or Muslim or Christian or Jew or Buddhist or Hindu or what have you.

Equality before the law is an inherent piece of our system, and an inherent piece of the international system. And we don't always manage to get there on each individual case, but we do, over time, make the improvements that are necessary to address these issues. And we'll continue to do that, because it is important.

On your second question -- the U.S. has a robust civil society, including groups like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and Freedom House that do annual reports on the U.S. record. And we welcome those reports. We think they are terrific. They have been used by the U.S. government to improve our own legislation, to improve our regulations and our practices.

So we accept criticism from any and all quarters, and we're more than happy to have that discussion. So if Qatar wants to do a report on the U.S. we would welcome that and read it with interest.

On your first question about the election of governments that the U.S. -- I think you stated "doesn't like" —

SPEAKER: (Off mike.)

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: —"doesn't agree with."

There are lots of issues on which the U.S. does not agree with other governments. And we have discussions and we agree to disagree.

The case of Hamas is different in a couple ways. We recognize, deal with, talk with, dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, which is the elected government. The Palestinian Authority is the elected government of the Palestinian people. Hamas is not the elected government, it's the Palestinian Authority. That's what the elections were, was to the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas has chosen to pick up the gun and take over Gaza -- violently.

SPEAKER: (Off mike)

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: And that is a different issue. That is not how a democratic government behaves.

And we have said very clearly that there are certain things that Hamas needs to do. They need to

renounce violence, first and foremost, as a matter of policy before we will deal with them. And we've been very clear about that. That continues to be our policy.

MR. AMR: Thank you.

We'll go to the next question. Sir?

SPEAKER: (Off mike.) I thank you for your rosy and (inaudible) presentation.

MR. AMR: And please identify yourself.

SPEAKER: I'm (inaudible) Zachariah (inaudible).

I appreciate and praise American people for their cultural and ethnic diversity, technological advance, dominance of law -- which we are missing in our countries.

You Americans are smart in your (inaudible). You support (inaudible), you support totalitarian governments. They are doing their best to realize your interests in our countries. This is one.

Do you think there will be try democracy in our countries while there are -- that circumstances prevail, poverty, underdevelopment, unfair distribution of wealth, corruption, et cetera. I don't like to (inaudible).

Given that, do you think that true democracy can be a (inaudible).

I think there is a difference between democracy and fake democracy. Do you think this is a democracy that we practice, without (inaudible), without (inaudible).

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you for your question, and I'll do the same with your questions and address them in reverse order.

As I said previously, democracy is not just elections. Elections are one piece of democracy, and a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. Democracy also requires independent government institutions, and good governance. That means accountability. That means responsible governance. That means transparent governance -- including an independent judiciary, an elected legislature that has authority independent from an elected executive. Those are necessary pieces of democracy as well.

And democracy also requires an active an involved civil society, including non-governmental organizations, an independent media, an active private sector that challenges and discusses issues of concern with the government.

And so it's all of these pieces put together. Elections are not a democracy. And so you need all those pieces so that you don't end up with a fake democracy which is only elections and then, you know, move forward and don't listen, and don't let courts make independent rulings and judgments and things like that.

So -- yes, I agree with you that there needs to be all the pieces and parts to have a true democracy.

Now, some countries evolved pieces and parts of that faster than others. And what we look at is how can we help on all those fronts? How can we work and push and press on all those fronts, because they're all necessary to have a true democracy.

On your second question, you said democracy -- is it possible to have democracy when you have poverty and injustice?

Democracies are perhaps the best form of government able to address injustice and these really deep challenges. It is possible to address those challenges without democracy. There are wealthy countries that have been able to do that without democracy.

But, at the end of the day, you don't have to be rich to be democratic. When you look at some of the poorest countries in Africa -- Mali is right down at the very bottom of U.N. indicators for, you know, economic GDP, for lots and lots of development indicators, for literacy, et cetera, et cetera, yet they have a vibrant participatory democracy, where they have developed political parties, they have changed back and forth between political parties in the majority in their parliament and their head of state. They have an independent court system. And they have a flourishing independent media and civil society that is helping to address the problems of insecurity on their borders, which they have difficulty controlling because they don't have resources -- that is addressing issues of economic development and equality, that is addressing of lack of education in rural areas, et cetera.

And they're making it work. Despite the enormous impoverishment, economically, of their people they are enormously rich democratically.

And so it's not a necessary precondition to be wealthy and for everybody to be equally wealthy to have democracy. It would be good to have that, as

well. And economic development and democratic development often are mutually reinforcing and go hand in hand and help accelerate each other.

And when you see some of the very successful Asian countries, where economic development and political reform have gone together, you have seen economies shoot forward -- 12 percent growth rates -- as well as participation in civil society, a flourishing media where there hadn't been any a few decades before. And the huge impact that that has had on people's ability to participate in global economy, as well as in the global discussion about how do we tackle all these challenges that we have has been absolutely terrific.

So, you know, ideally they go hand in hand, but it's not a necessary precondition.

On your first question about is the U.S. government supporting governments that are abusing the rights of their people I think was the heart of your question.

The U.S. government has a number of national interests around the world, as I said -- you know, tackling transnational issues, including global terrorism, trafficking in persons, the environment,

disease, et cetera. We have economic interests, certainly. We have, as I said, security interests. We have political interests around the world. And we have to always balance out those interests and decide what we tackle when.

But we have said, and the Secretary has said and the President has said, that we will not, even when we have very important issues with governments on terrorism on, you know, regional stability, et cetera, that we will not ignore human freedom and we will not ignore human rights, and we will not ignore the needs for political reform.

And so even while we're discussing with countries the, you know, how do we deal with the issues of terrorism, we also discuss with them, "And, by the way, political reform and greater respect for human rights will help deal with this in your own society, and there's problems that we see."

And so I think that we can, as the saying goes, walk and chew gum at the same time. And we believe that as those conversations continue that other governments will understand that they can also walk and chew gum at the same time, that we can still have a discussion about terrorism and we can still cooperate

on terrorism and security issues, but that we also have to coach their cooperating on political reform issues and on human rights issues.

MR. AMR: Thanks, Erica. There's a lot of hands up -- so that's a good sign that this is an interesting conversation.

In the interest of time what I'm going to ask the audience and our guest to do is to try to keep the answers brief. There's a whole bunch of questions here, so Mr. Ambassador, and then we'll go across the front row.

Sir?

AMBASSADOR BEGONIA: (Off mike.) Thank you very much. I'm the Ambassador of the Philippines in the State of Qatar. But I am here not as the Ambassador, but in my personal capacity. I just happened to be very interested in the topic at hand, that we're discussing now.

Now I would like to pursue the question of Mr. (inaudible) about the recently released report of the State Department regarding Human Rights.

My question is, is it -- you get your information from various sources. How do you validate, how do you make (inaudible) sure that the information

you get are not tainted by (inaudible) probably coming from somebody with an agenda?

The second is -- you have the report. Before you published the report did you discuss your finding with the governments, the concerned government?

And then, with this report, how do you go forward? How do you follow up the issues that you work up in the report in order to alleviate some of the problems?

Now, in the case of Qatar, what is the most urgent issue that came out from your report that needs to be addressed?

These are the questions. Thank you.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Great. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I'll try to be very brief.

Our reports are exhaustively and extensively fact-checked. We understand that there are some people who put out things on the internet and in the media that are biased, and we therefore have an extensive fact-checking process as far as with our embassies here, with our regional experts in Washington, and checking to make sure we have multiple sources to make sure we're getting the facts right.

And the reports stand on their own basis, and we stand by them because we believe that they have been so exhaustively fact-checked that they are correct.

As far as talking to governments about the contents of the report before the report, we talk about human rights issues -- whether it's trafficking issues, whether it's religious freedom issues, whether it's women's rights, whether it's political rights -- with governments on a continuing basis. And so we have those discussions throughout the year, not just around the Human Rights Report, because we believe it's an important discussion to have on an ongoing basis.

We do not go exhaustively through the report and give a preview of the report to any government. We do not believe that that's useful, to do as a matter of policy. But we do make sure that we have these discussions continuously and throughout the year. And so very rarely are governments surprised by the issues we raise because they've heard it before from us on the main issues.

And how do we move, use these to go forward? As I said, part of what we do is making sure that we are working to put our money where our mouth is on programs and sending people like me out to have

discussions. We believe that it's really important to follow up on implementation, where there's a lack of resources to try and help provide those resources, where there's a lack of expertise to help and try and provide that expertise. And when there's a lack of discourse, to help provoke and provide the impetus for discussion of these issues to get them out in the open, air them, get ideas flowing about how to address these challenges.

Because it's all well and good to put out a factual report on here's what happened, but what we like to see is improvements and action to address those issues. And we believe that we have a role to play in a cooperative effort to do that.

AMBASSADOR BEGONIA: (Off mike)

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Oh, the main issues in the Qatar report?

We talked about the issues of freedom of speech, press, assembly and association here in our report. We talked about -- as I mentioned at the beginning -- the pledge to set an election date, and we hope to see that soon. We had talked about the issues of women's rights. We talked about labor rights issues in our report. Those are kind of the main highlights.

MR. AMR: There's a lot of hands up, and in the interest of time what I'm going to ask is: two quick questions at a time, and we'll do three sets of two quick questions, if we can, and then wrap it up.

So, you two gentlemen in the front. There's only so much time, unfortunately. If you could be brief, because we do have to wrap up in a few minutes.

SPEAKER: (Off mike.) Good evening. I'm Abbas Mussa from Al Watan newspaper, Qatar daily.

You mentioned that you defend the journalist who will be exposed to certain violations, and you praised Al-Jazeera for its -- because it's a symbol of freedom of speech. But at the same time you captured Sami al Haj in Guantanamo for no reason, no trial. And, finally, threw him in (inaudible) airport without any human rights or something.

What is this contradictions in your speech and your actions that you said that your words will be like your actions? There's much contradictory in your speech. How do you clarify this?

MR. AMR: Thank you.

And then the question here, let's take another question.

SPEAKER: (In Arabic.)

MR. AMR: We're going to take you to trans —

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: I need a translation.

MR. AMR: We don't have the —

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you.

MR. AMR: Let's hope it works.

SPEAKER: (In Arabic)

MR. AMR: Thank you.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you for those questions. I'll address your question first, on Sami al-Haj.

The premise of your question was that he was thrown into detention for no reason. Mr. al-Haj was detained in Guantanamo because of his affiliation with dangerous terrorists and extremists. And we believe, and we continue to believe, that it was necessary to do so. We also believe that it was right to release him when we did. We returned him to his country of citizenship, which is Sudan, when he was released from Guantanamo.

His affiliation with Al-Jazeera and his profession as a journalist was absolutely irrelevant to the reasons why he was in Guantanamo and had nothing to do with either his detention or his release.

On your question on trafficking in humans, the Trafficking in Persons Report, the standards which the U.S. writes all of our reports, as I said earlier, are based on the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights, the UDHR, as well as international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and there is a section in that convention about trafficking, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which there is an optional protocol on trafficking and the abuse of children in child labor -- there are two different protocols on that -- as well as standards that have been set out by the International Labor Organization, which is a subsidiary body of the U.N.

We use international standards in writing those reports. So they're freely undertaken obligations by governments to adhere to those international standards, and that's what we hold as the basis for our reports.

As far as what's in the report, I would urge you to read the reports. They're available at www.state.gov. There is a "Trafficking in Persons" button on the front page, and the report on Qatar, as all the other countries is rather short and an easy

read. It's about a page and a half long. And it does, indeed, address some of the positive steps that have been taken here, but it also does not pull punches on the issues and challenges and continuing abuses that are here, and does give some recommendations on how to address those issues -- which we have also discussed with the government, and which we discuss with civil society and which we'll continue to discuss.

MR. AMR: Thanks.

So there were two questions back here, and then we'll try to wrap up after a couple questions here.

SPEAKER: I want to ask —

MR. AMR: Excuse me, please. We're going to do three questions back here, each question of 30 seconds, maximum. So -- one, two, three, because we're about to close.

SPEAKER: (In Arabic)

MR. AMR: Thank you.

And then if we can just get the other two questions quickly, and then I think we're going to have to wrap up after those two. I apologize to those who we couldn't get to.

SPEAKER: Recently the Iraqi (inaudible) government —

MR. AMR: If you could please identify yourself and speak up.

SPEAKER: Recently, the Iraqi (inaudible) government had pull out regarding the issue of private security enterprises in Iraq. The U.S. was requesting that these enterprises not to be held accountable for the killing of Iraqi civilians.

How do you regard this from the point of view of human rights?

MR. AMR: Thank you. And your name?

SPEAKER: (Inaudible).

MR. AMR: Thank you.

And then the third question, the gentleman back there. And I really apologize to others. But we're going to have to wrap up at this point.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible.) My name is Mohammad Maki (inaudible.)

(In Arabic)

MR. AMR: Thank you.

MS. BARKS-RUGGLES: Thank you for those questions. And I'll try to answer each of them in turn.

On the GCC response to the Trafficking in Persons Report, the Trafficking in Persons Report is not politically motivated. As I said at the beginning, it is a mandated report by our Congress. It is a facts-based report. It is short, and it just -- it goes through the facts of what has happened over the course of the last year.

We do these reports, not just on the GCC but around the world. We talk about source countries as well as the receiving countries. And I commend the reports to you, as I said.

As far as human rights violations, there are human rights violations here. There are human rights abuses here, as we outlined in our Human Rights Reports. There are also some efforts to address them, and we have acknowledged those efforts where they have occurred.

As I said at the beginning, we have been encouraged by the establishment of a shelter for trafficking victims here. We hope that that shelter will be fully utilized. We've also heard discussion about possible reforms in some of the laws, including, hopefully, potentially, the sponsorship law. We

encourage that discussion to move forward. We believe that it would help address these issues.

On the second question, about Iraq and the private security firms in Iraq, the U.S. doesn't claim to be perfect. We have had problems of human rights being abused by individuals in cases such as the private security firms in Iraq that you cited, as well as placed like Abu Ghraib. And I am ashamed, as an American citizen and as a U.S. government official, that those abuses happened and occurred. They should not. They are wrong. It has been stated very clearly by our government.

In cases where there have been abuses, I am proud that our free and independent media in the United States has been at the forefront of exposing those problems. We have had a press that has held our government accountable, and our government has taken action to correct those mistakes, to investigate when abuses have occurred, and where it is appropriate, to prosecute, convict and imprison people who have been involved in abuses. And that will continue to be our policy.

We have also been able to put in place changes in policies and regulations that have helped to

prevent future abuses, because it's not just about punishment, it's about prevention.

So the systems of checks and balances are working. They should have worked better to prevent the abuses in the first place, but where those abuses are occurring, the systems of checks and balances are working correctively, and hopefully to prevent future abuses.

On the third question, I appreciate your comment on the American campaign, Presidential campaign. Our elections are a very open, very loud and very long process. And we appreciate the great interest in them around the world, welcome the journalists who have come to cover the election, including journalists from this area. And we hope that it helps illuminate for people how we go about choosing our leaders.

And as I said in response to a question earlier, we believe that every person around the world deserves the right to have their voices heard and to have justice and liberty as an inherent human right and human value. So to say that one particular region of the world, whether it's this region or another region, is not ready for reform is just something I don't buy into. I believe that each person deserves to have

their rights respected. And I believe that there are enormous resources here, both human resources -- there's a hugely well educated population of people -- as well as vast economic resources to address these issues and these challenges. And we look forward to working with the people of these countries, as well as the governments, to try and address them and move forward.

MR. AMR: Thank you, Erica.

I want to apologize to all of you in the audience who didn't get to ask your question. We do need to wrap up.

On behalf of the staff of the Brookings Doha Center, Ms. Zeino , Mr. Sharif and the rest of our staff, I want to thank the audience for your vibrant participation and questions. I'd like to thank our speaker, United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Erica Barks-Ruggles. And I'd like to invite you all to join us for a drink, juices and snacks, in the adjacent room.

So thank you all for coming.

(Applause)

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